

# THE MORNING CALL

## **‘Utter sadness’ felt for Dallas police as Lehigh Valley police head out on patrol**

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Easton police Capt. Scott Casterline said he awoke in the middle of the night and glanced at his smartphone.

"At that point, it was still one officer had been killed," Casterline said of the news from Dallas.

He felt sadness for the officers and their families, as he always does, and went back to bed.

By the time he reawoke Friday morning, the number of dead officers in Texas stood at five.

Four Dallas police officers and one transit officer had been killed at a downtown rally over fatal police shootings of black men in Louisiana and Minnesota. Seven Dallas officers were wounded.

"It was shocking to see in the morning," Casterline said. "It's hard to say what your emotions can be other than shock."

With "utter sadness," as a police captain in Allentown put it, officers across the Lehigh Valley went to work Friday morning knowing it would not be a normal day, but prepared to do their job as if it were.

Commanders at Casterline's department in Easton, like others in the Lehigh Valley, reviewed safety procedures, while others — Allentown and Bethlehem — made some operational changes to protect their officers.

"We went over some of the basic officer safety protocols — be vigilant out there — but also remember that shouldn't affect how we deal with the public," Casterline said. "We reminded them that the vast majority of the public supports us."

In recent years, the relationship between police and minorities has grown increasingly strained nationwide as several high-profile cases of fatal police shootings of black men have sparked protests and rallies like the one that preceded Thursday night's mass shooting of officers in Dallas.

"I just felt utter sadness and shock for those officers and their families," Allentown police Capt. Tony Alsleben said Friday morning. "Then my thoughts turned to our officers and their safety."

He said Allentown officers took extra safety precautions Friday, but declined to discuss specifics.

Alsleben said commanders at roll call stressed safety and avoiding complacency, noting that being shot at or even killed is "a danger and a threat that we face every day."

After nearly a week of violence between police and civilians with deaths on both sides, such killings feel like they're happening more often than ever before. But Jonathan Blanks, a criminal justice research associate at the Cato Institute in Washington, D.C., said groups like his lack the data to validate any trends on police violence against civilians, or civilian violence against police.

Only hard data, not videos of shootings posted on Twitter and Facebook, will tell if there have been more killings in recent years, he said.

Still, Blanks said, police killings aren't a new occurrence.

"This happens more often than people understand," Blanks said. "I would say [social media] has clarified our perspective."

But the Dallas shootings dominated the media starting Thursday night, when Bethlehem police Chief Mark DiLuzio said he first saw a news alert on television saying someone was shooting officers at an anti-police brutality rally in Dallas.

From that point on, he was glued to the news as reports continued to change.

"I was up to 1:30 a.m., I wanted to see what happened," DiLuzio said.

Later that morning, he sent his officers a group letter.

"We have to continue to do our job like we do every other day," DiLuzio told them. "You have to come to work every day and do your job no matter what happened [even] an hour before."

He said he ordered dispatchers to double the number of officers sent to incidents. For major incidents, he wanted one or two more officers than typically needed to handle the call and keep an eye out for trouble.

DiLuzio said he also reminded his officers that there may be some groups that are looking for a confrontation and that they should remain professional.

Salisbury Township police Chief Allen Stiles said Friday his department was grieving, but being so close to Bethlehem and Allentown, his officers are trained to always be on high alert. He did not increase security.

In the northern tier of Northampton County, Slate Belt Regional police Chief David Mettin said additional steps were not necessary in the small towns and rural stretches covered by the department.

"We haven't had any backlash in the wake of shootings the last two years," Mettin said. "We won't have any pullback, but I understand the sentiment in some of the larger police departments and the need to reevaluate services and officer safety."

Some police officials lamented that community support isn't what it once was.

"The way law enforcement is perceived at this time, in this day, it's unfortunate that we are considered not to be the heroes and members of an honorable profession we once had been," Palmer Township Lt. Thomas Trinchere said. "It almost seems like it's a war on police at this time."

With the five deaths Thursday in Dallas, 26 officers have been shot and killed nationwide this year, according to the Washington Post. Last year, 39 officers were shot and killed, according to the Officer Down Memorial Page, which tracks police deaths.

The FBI tracks officers killed and assaulted. Those statistics show an average of 50 police officers were killed each year between 2005 and 2014.

Last year, the Washington Post reported that 2006-2010, the last complete five-year period of statistics available, was the least deadly five-year period for law enforcement officers since before the 1960s.

The Post began to track police shootings last year, reporting that 990 people were killed by police in 2015. In the first six months of 2015, 465 people were shot and killed by police. In the first six months of 2016, 491 people have been shot and killed by police.

But police point out, those high-profile incidents of police shootings are a small percentage of interactions with citizens every day.

"There are hundreds of thousands of police officers that put their lives in jeopardy every day, that do awesome, heroic things every day that are not acknowledged," Trinchere said.

Among the images Thursday night of demonstrators, gunfire and an officer being shot in the back at point-blank range were images of Dallas police helping protesters find cover.

That's the positive Casterline said he hopes people remember.